



## PRESS RELEASE

### Watou Arts Festival 2023

The city of Poperinge, inspirator Koen Vanmechelen and the curators of the Watou Arts Festival Edith Doove and Michaël Vandebril give us a first glimpse of Watou 2023. This edition will take place from 1 July to 3 September 2023 and is given **/kom.po'zi.ci.o:/** as its baseline. Thirty artists and twenty poets will 'compose' new in situ work. This year, the arts festival furthermore surprises with several new venues, a podcast with Jelle Van Riet and a poetry cycle route with war poems.

#### **Patchwork at the basis**

The starting point for the arts festival was the launch of an open call in spring 2022. 170 artists from home and abroad applied for Patchwork last year. An interdisciplinary and international jury selected 30 artists who camped in the village during the summer of 2022. They interacted with the inhabitants, felt the landscape and immersed themselves in the festival that took place that summer. Based on their experiences, they worked out project proposals for new installations. From these proposals, the jury selected 19 projects that are currently being realised and will be on view at Arts Festival Watou 2023.



F.l.t.r.: Michaël Vandebril, Koen Vanmechelen and Edith Doove. © Michaël Depestele

Watou 2023 will also have a new visual arts curator; Dutch curator, writer and researcher Edith Doove. Doove is part of Patchwwwork's jury for the second time this year. For the 2023 edition, she will also act as curator of the arts festival. "Two-thirds of the festival programme was therefore collectively proposed. While I did have a voice in this, I am thus not the sole author. I find that a very important and also fairly unique fact, which led me to accept the curatorship with particular pleasure. While it is true that I can direct, shape or supplement an entire exhibition or festival, in so doing I always seek a continuous exchange with others."

## **/kom.po'zi.ci.o:/**



Watou 2023 is given the theme **/kom.po'zi.ci.o:/**. The concept refers to French sociologist Bruno Latour. "In this specific era, characterised by the consequences of the so-called Anthropocene with an undeniable warming of the climate and a war that is coming very close to our doorstep, according to Latour it is more important than ever to make well-considered choices, to compose," says Doove. "The choice of Composition as the name for the festival derives from both a full consideration of the principle behind Patchwwwork and the work of the chosen Patchwwwork artists themselves. The idea of careful composition, attentive observation of the local in interaction with the global, collaboration and exchange is always present therein."

"Not only does the world have something to teach the village, but also vice versa. The global only exists because of the generosity of the local," Koen Vanmechelen says. "That formed the basis for my inspiration of Patchwwwork; a research project on what the next editions of Watou could look like. After two editions, I see a clear triptych emerging; Sense of Place showed the works in dialogue with their surroundings and explored the position of art (and the arts festival) in the world. This year, we go to the core and the focus is on development; forming the right composition. After the next Patchwwwork process, I believe we are going to be able to offer an answer to the question of what Watou can mean to the world, and we will be ready to go public with something new."



Patchwwwork during Arts Festival Watou 2022.

The list of 'Patchwworkers' was supplemented by Doove with other artists. "In my personal choice of additional artists I looked for a way to further strengthen that hybridity by working with what I like to call my "artistic family". With some of them I have been working for years now, others are more recent arrivals. For all contributions to the festival the emphasis lies above all on the curious discovery of the perhaps less familiar (or completely unfamiliar) in order to thus broaden a horizon," Doove said.

Watou 2023 will feature work by more than 30 artists:

**Beatrijs Albers en Reggy Timmermans\* (BE) - Niels Albers (NL) - Funda Zeynep Ayguler (DE) - Iwert Bernakiewicz (BE) - Sven Boel (BE) - Cloé Decroix\* (FR) - Alexandra Dementieva\* (BE) - Niel de Vries (NL) - Griet Dobbels (BE) - Philippe Druez (BE) - Juls Gabs (UK) - Benoît Géhanne\* (FR) - Marilynne Grimmer (FR) - Marc Hamandjian\* (FR) - Nathalie Hunter\* (BE) - Maarten Inghels (BE) - Pierre Mertens\* (BE) - Charlotte Mumm (DE) - Öznur Öztürk (BE) - Alain Platel en Berlinde De Bruyckere (BE) - Jiajia Qi (NL) - Henk Schut (NL) - Robert Ssempijja (UG) - Joris Vermassen (BE) - Koen Vanmechelen\* (BE) - Louisiana Van Onna (NL) - Wouter Vanderstede en Peter Simon (BE) - Various Artists - Esther Venrooij\* (NL) - ZONDERWERK\* (BE)**

*\*These artists were selected by Edith Doove*

### **Interwovenness between poetry, visual arts and the village**

This year too, Watou guarantees to be a place where visual art and poetry merge. Michaël Vandebril remains on board as the curator of poetry and jury member of Patchwwork. Vandebril has a close relationship with Watou, having co-founded the Huis van de Dichter in Watou, the former residence of Gwij Mandelinck that has been a place of choice for literary creators since 2018. "Poperinge's continued belief in Watou's power as an art and poetry village does it honour. The essence of the arts festival? It

makes people happier than before," Vandebril said.



Vandebril again opts for new creations. "As far as the choice of the poetry is concerned, my artistic proposal to the Arts Festival was not to choose existing poems, which was often done in the past, but to opt for new creations so that the Patchwork format is strengthened. I paired each artist with a poet, and together they entered into dialogue, resulting in a new poem that was inspired by the artwork and that was also integrated on site. In this way, the interwovenness between art, poetry and place received maximum visibility and this was also appreciated by the general public that visited the festival. For Watou 2023 I have been involved from the start, as part of the 'curatorial team' that selects and accompanies the artists. In this way I am even better positioned to link the artists with the poets so that the match is fruitful and inspiring," says Vandebril.

Nathalie Hunter, Marc Hamandjian, Michaël Vandebril and Edith Doove on Watou Square.

Watou 2023 will feature new work by more than 20 poets:

**Alara Adilow (NL) - Anna Broeksma (NL) - Joost Decorte (BE) - Lotte Dodion (BE) - Radna Fabias (NL) - Marie Ginet (FR) - Max Greyson (BE) - Luuk Gruwez (BE) - Ilya Kaminski (US/UKR) - Mustafa Kör (BE) - Caroline Lamarche (BE) - Marije Langelaar (NL) - Delphine Lecompte (BE) - Lisette Lombé (BE) - Gerry Loose (UK) - Nisrine Mbarki (NL) - Tijn Nuyts (BE) - Johanna Pas (BE) - Siel Verhanneman (BE)**

### **Cycling route with war poems**

In addition to these in situ poems, the poetry section is complemented by a new cycling route. "The project *Landscapes | Feel Flanders Fields* aims to unlock the traces of WWI in the Westhoek landscape. It is an initiative of Tourism Flanders and Westtoer. Several initiatives, including the poetry cycle route, reinforce the war and peace story of the Westhoek. The route takes the cyclist along several war poems selected or written by contemporary poets including Geert Buelens, Ruth Lasters, David Van Reybrouck, Maud Vanhauwaert, Bart F.M. Droog, Andy Fierens, Alicja Gescinska, Peter Theunynck and Max Temmerman. The WWI theme also inspired some of our artists. In the castle, an impressive set from the performance *Why We Fight*, by Alain Platel and Berlinde De Bruyckere, will be on display for the first time," says Alderman for Culture, Loes Vandromme.

### **Poetry podcast Huis van de Dichter**

Finally, Huis van de Dichter and its ambassador Jelle Van Riet, in collaboration with Arts Festival Watou, Poëziecentrum and De Standaard, are making an in-depth podcast that aims to entice people to read poetry. In seven episodes, poets and readers in the old rectory house, the former home of Gwy Mandelinck, share their secrets and passion for poetry

### **Arts Festival Watou launches another open call**



During Patchwork, participants together with artist Koen Vanmechelen will explore how Watou as a village and as a community can connect with the artists and vice versa.

Professional artists and final-year art students can apply for this project through an open call. An international jury will then select the artists who will spend three days in Watou this summer. Based on their experiences, these 'Patchworkers' will submit project proposals for new work and thus put themselves forward as candidates for Kunstenfestival Watou 2024.

Registration for the open call is still open until 20 April 2023 via the website.

## Visit Watou 2023

Watou 2023 takes place from 1 July to 3 September. The arts festival can be visited from Wednesday to Monday, from 10am to 6pm each time. Tuesday is the closing day. Tickets can be bought via the website from mid-May for 20 euros (standard rate).

Alderman for culture, Loes Vandromme: "Slowly experiencing Watou is the message the festival conveys. It is best to spread your visit over several days. The ticket is therefore valid for several days to give the public the chance to fully enjoy the arts festival, but also the surroundings, Poperinge and the Westhoek. Indeed, Watou 2023 offers not only art and poetry, but also nature, tranquillity and relaxation." Thanks to a collaboration with several partners in the area, visitors are encouraged to combine their visit to the Arts Festival with other activities in Poperinge and the Westhoek.

In Watou itself, visitors will recognise familiar locations. A number of new locations will provide a surprising route through the village. Watou remains the Arts Festival's base of operations, showcasing the bulk of the artists and poets.

De Lovie Castle is also part of the trail. A witness to the residential culture of the aristocracy in the 19th century, the castle has a unique history. The castle and park itself offer special opportunities for the presentation of art and poetry. The park offers peace, security and space to those who stay, work or go to school there.

## Buy your ticket in May at 18 euros!

This year, the arts festival is popping up with an early booking promotion. Tickets can be bought for 18 euros during the month of May. Moreover, these early birds have the chance to win a St Bernard experience package worth 40 euros.

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